CARMEN BRADFORD

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CARMEN BRADFORD

BIOGRAPHY

Classy, sophisticated, yet sassy and soulful, premier vocalist **CARMEN BRADFORD** has earned the reputation for her ability to use her more-than-ample vocal skills on a diverse range of material. While **"FINALLY YOURS"** (her auspicious debut album for Amazing Records) offered a dazzling mixture of Jazz, R&B and pop, she decided to make Jazz the musical focus for her latest project. Covering all elements of Jazz, **"WITH RESPECT"**, is an album that further establishes the Chicago-based singer as one of the decade's most exciting vocal stylists.

"Making this album was more of a challenge for me," says **CARMEN**. "It was kinda scary for me to do a Jazz Album but it was something I felt I had to do, a musical statement I had to make. Working with musicians of the calibre of (pianists) Cedar Walton and Donald Brown was a real honor...and just a little bit overwhelming. I kept wondering if I sang well enough to even be in the same room with guys like that!"

She needn't have worried: from finger-snappin' sound of "Even Steven" to her haunting, poignant reading of "Maybe Now," **CARMEN** is truly in her element. Original songs like the tender ballad "Was I In Love Alone," written by her Mother, Singer/Songwriter and Broadway star Melba Joyce ("a great singer, a helluva writer and a pretty good Mother too!") are perfect vehicles for **CARMEN'S** well-crafted, distinctive vocal style; while she takes on material made popular by others with reverence, putting her own indelible stamp on each tune.

Included among the eleven tracks that compose **"WITH RESPECT"** is a remarkable tour-de-force performance on the bluesy "Ain't No Use," a song associated with Joe Williams; a swinging version of "Mr. Paganini (You'll Have To Swing It)," a song recorded by Ella Fitzgerald; and a reading of the evergreen "Nature Boy" (accompanied by acoustic guitar) whose melancholy mood makes it one of the highlights of the album. For good measure, **CARMEN** tackles Chick Corea's "High Wire" and "Look Who's Mine," a Sergio Mendes classic, turning in winning performances on both tunes.

Commenting on some of the songs that make **"WITH RESPECT"** a musical treat, **CARMEN** notes, "I used to listen to "Look Who's Mine" as a teenager...it was the regulation tune for Saturday mornings when I was dusting and doing the chores. I told myself one day I'd record it and I love how it turned out. Having (Brazilian Guitarist) Dori Caymmi arrange the music and play was like fulfilling a life-long dream, he was truly wonderful, as was (percussionist) Bill Summers. I pondered for several months over doing "Mr. Paganini," which is my tribute to Ella. I didn't know whether I should try to do a song like that because it's very difficult to sing. But now I'm very happy I did it."

CARMEN'S decision to record "High Wire" may have been the by-product of coming from a musical family: "Living in a household where you have two great entertainers, (her father is Jazz Trumpeter/Composer Bobby Bradford, while Mother Melba Joyce is a well-known entertainer in her own right) you're going to hear a lot of music and "High Wire" is one of those songs that was always being played. My Mother had it in her repertoire for a long time and when we were recording the album, we were short one uptempo tune. Cedar (Walton) recommended the song to me...and of course, I already knew it so that's how it ended up on the record."

Having "Nature Boy" set to a classical guitar was "my idea. We weren't originally going to record it but I did a gig with (guitarist) Michael O'Neill and we included it in the show. That's when I knew I had to record it for the album." And, of "Ain't No Use," **CARMEN** says "Joe Williams has always been a major influence for me, along with my Mother. I love everything he does, so I figured, let me try it and it turned out great."

CARMEN'S latest work reflects the depth of musical experience that she's amassed since making her professional debut during her college years studying classical music in Austin, Texas (which happens to be her birthplace). Raised in Pasadena, California, **CARMEN** was surrounded by music from an early age. Apart from her parental influences, "I listened to a lot of music growing up. Ella, Sarah, Nancy, Doris Day, Rosemary Clooney, Nat Cole, Tony Bennett. I started singing Jazz when I was very young and it never left my heart," **CARMEN** recalls.

After singing with a diverse range of artists (including Lou Rawls, James Brown and Willie Nelson), **CARMEN** joined The Count Basie Orchestra in 1983 and stayed with the renowned band for nine years, traversing the globe and sometimes playing fifty-two weeks a year. "I had a fifteen-minute slot from 9:45PM to 10:00PM," **CARMEN** muses. "Yes, I definitely paid a lot of dues."

In 1990, **CARMEN** duetted with George Benson on the song "How Do You Keep The Music Playing?" from his Grammy-winning "Big Boss Band" album and a year later, she felt it was time to step out and begin her solo career in earnest. In 1992, she recorded **"FINALLY YOURS,"** her critically-acclaimed first album and began a new chapter in her illustrious career.

In between preparing and recording material for **"WITH RESPECT", CARMEN** teamed with Herbie Hancock to cut a guest vocal on the song "Butterfly" for a 1994 Hancock album, as well as performing with Lena Horne at a special tribute to the Tuskegee Airmen in early '93.

"I was very fortunate in having great folks like Donald Brown and Lynn Coles (my Manager) as co-producers, Cedar Walton, Dori Caymmi, Bill Summers, (arranger) John Clayton and (vibist) Steve Nelson to work with in the studio," says **CARMEN**. "Yes, I really like the way the album turned out. It's me making a statement about doing what I know how to do."

And one thing **CARMEN BRADFORD** knows how to do naturally is sing Jazz. Heart and soul, with passion and love.

DISCOGRAPHY

1986	**"LONG LIVE THE CHIEF"**	**DENON 33CY-1018**
1989	**"THE LEGEND, THE LEGACY"**	**DENON CJ73790**
1990	**"BIG BOSS BAND"**	**WARNER BROS. 9 26295-2**
1992	**"FINALLY YOURS"**	**AMAZING AMZ-1030**

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R E V I E W S

"Carmen's well-honed skill as a vocalist comes as no surprise when you consider the fact that she was hired by the legendary William "Count" Basie. I am proud she counts me on her list of musical influences. That wide range of influences is reflected in her music and should dissuade all those folks who might try to fit CARMEN into some one dimensional musical category. Her smile is devastating, her personality (like her music) is always warm, and she's got a great set of pipes! *NANCY WILSON*

"Bradford's singing is forceful, effective and deeply rooted in traditional jazz abilities. She is wise enough to realize the emotion belongs in the song and not in stage theatrics, uses her voice with well-disciplined virtuosity, drawing from deep within rather than using superficial vocal showmanship. Carmen is among the best and brightest of young female singers, her live act always sparkles with polished professionalism."

By Michael Point, Austin American Statesman

#4 1992's Best Albums
Slowly, steadily and inexorably building a solo career, Bradford stands as one of the most promising jazz singers in the business. The size of her voice and the conviction of her readings separate her from most of her peers."

By Howard Reich, Chicago Tribune

"Always listening and absorbing "Finally Yours" is a testament to her influences, but she leans toward jazz mostly. From the sounds of this album, it looks like this lady is here to make a mark in the music industry."

By Tony Matthews, BRE Magazine

"Carmen Bradford has picked up the nickname "Miss Jazz" due to her extensive travels and performances. Whether you're a veteran jazz collector, or just getting into some new sounds, you can't pick a better place to start than with "Finally Yours."

By Mike Ramey, Indianapolis Recorder

"The second you punch up Carmen Bradford's album "Finally Yours" the singer throws you a curve. Accompanied only by nylon-string guitar, singing an inspirational ballad in typically soulful and melismatic fashion. Not surprisingly, her finest moments come when the songs have stood the test of time or tap the kind of vocal power and assurance that prompted Basie to recruit Bradford in the first place. "Rough Ridin", a vibrant remembrance of Ella Fitzgerald, is a double treat. "You Must Believe In Spring" reveal the often overlooked subtlety of her interpretive gifts as well. "Finally Yours" easily achieves its goal of placing Bradford in the spotlight she deserves."

By Mike Joyce, Washington Post

"The Genes of two talented people have produced a singer with a strong voice, open ears and the tenacity of a stage queen."

By Mark Ruffin, Chicago Jazz Magazine